

## **Ida B. Wells-Barnett**

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In 1894, after hearing a black man had been lynched by a mob of whites, Ida B. Wells decided to take action by publishing *A Red Record* about lynching of black Americans. Wells wanted to make people aware of the injustices to blacks. In her book she not only recorded the numbers of lynchings of black Americans, but also an overview of the history of lynching since the Emancipation Proclamation.

Her parents learned as slaves the principles of strength and courage, and passed these characteristics on to their daughter. Ida's parents also taught her to stand up for her beliefs. As a result, Ida, an African American, who grew up in Mississippi, became a woman who wanted to make people aware of how the whites humiliated blacks. In 1884, Wells worked her way through Rust College, Mississippi, and after graduating taught school in Memphis, Tennessee. Four years later, Wells continued her teaching career while attending Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. On May 4, 1884, Wells bought a train ticket and sat in the "whites only" section. Since Wells refused to ride in the car set aside for African Americans, the "colored car," the conductor threw her off the train as white passengers applauded. However, Wells would not let this incident rest. Soon after, she sued the railroad and won her case, but the Tennessee Supreme Court later overturned the decision. Wells became even more determined to fight against racial injustice.

As a result of the Tennessee Supreme Court decision in 1891, Wells was prohibited from teaching and took a job as an editor for the *Memphis Free Speech*.

Because of her articles on lynching, Wells' offices were ransacked and her life was threatened. However, she did not let this deter her from her writing. Two years later, while investigating the lynching of C. J. Miller, in Bardwell, Kentucky, Wells discovered Miller was falsely accused and took the blame for others. With thousands of whites being involved in this lynching, not one was punished.

Knowing there was nothing else to do, Wells returned to her home in Chicago. Before long, she received an invitation from the Brotherhood of Man, inviting her on a lecture tour in Great Britain. She accepted the offer. While there, Wells shared her anti-lynching message with anyone who would listen. Everywhere Wells went, however, she was shunned. At the same time, she began sending her articles to the *Chicago Inter-Ocean* newspaper.

Finally, returning to Illinois, Wells found someone who took her ideas seriously. In 1894 the *Memphis Daily Commercial* and the *Memphis Scinitar* sent copies of her articles to Great Britain. With her stunning articles, Wells influenced many British to begin their own anti-lynching group. That same year, 1894, Wells returned to Chicago.

Within a year, Wells married an African-American rights advocate, Ferdinand L. Barnett, a Chicago lawyer, public official, and a publisher of the *Conservator*, an independent Chicago newspaper. Instead of writing ordinary daily news, Ida wrote about things close to her heart, African-American problems in the community. Later, Ida B. Wells-Barnett became the editor-in-chief of the *Conservator*.

On March 25, 1931, a tragedy struck and Ida was rushed to the hospital. That same day she passed away in Chicago at the age of 69. On February 1, 1990, Ida Bell Wells-Barnett was honored with a stamp as the first black women journalist. Wells-

Barnett became known in the United States and throughout the world as a fighter for justice. [From Dennis Brindell Fradin and Judith Bloom Fradin, *Ida B. Wells, Mother of the Civil Rights Movement*; Wade Hudson and Valerie Wilson Wesley, *Book of Black Heroes From A to Z*; Ida B. Wells, “A Passion for Justice,” <<http://www.library.csi.cuny.edu/dept/history/lavender/wells.html>> (Dec. 21, 2004); Jessie Carney Smith, *Blacks First*; Lavon Williams (SHS), “*Summary of Crusade for Justice by Ida B. Wells Barnett*,” <<http://rs6.loc.gov/ammendment/aap/idawells.html>> (Dec. 15, 2004).]